



NEWS

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Babbitt Unveils Pivotal Recovery Plan for 68 Species in Everglades

Plan emphasizes science, monitoring, public and stakeholder cooperation toward de-listing

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt in Boca Raton today announced the completion of the largest, most comprehensive recovery plan to replenish native plants and animals in the Everglades watershed, an area encompassing the 19 southernmost counties in Florida, 6.5 million human inhabitants and a \$200 billion economy.

The Multi-Species Recovery Plan (MSRP) will serve as a tool for communities and landowners in developing Habitat Conservation Plans. And there is an added incentive. If the plan is fully implemented as written, it is projected to result in the 'de-listing' of 17 Federally listed species over the next two decades.

"It took the rapid die-off and listing of endangered native species for us to realize the River of Grass was in deep trouble," said Babbitt, "and it will take the resurgence and de-listing of those same species to know real restoration has taken hold. It has begun, and this plan takes us that much closer."

The plan has been specifically designed to be a flexible "living document" that recovers more than 68 federally listed species through restoration of 23 diverse ecological communities in the region. It is a strategic cornerstone of the Administration's larger Everglades Restoration Plan -- announced by Vice President Al Gore in February 1996 -- which committed to maintain the biological diversity of South Florida from the Kissimmee to the Keys.

"The MSRP is flexible enough to accommodate changes identified through ongoing and planned research," said USFWS Southeastern Regional Director Sam Hamilton. "It will require multiple stakeholder participation, interagency coordination, and public involvement to ensure that the process will continue."

The plan guides the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in:

- Leading the recovery of threatened and endangered species and their habitats by focusing on their ecological habitats or natural communities within the larger watershed.

- Coordinating species recovery with other Federal agencies, State, local and Tribal governments, conservation groups, academia, industry, and private citizens to restore South Florida.

- Exchanging information among the various working group efforts.

- Engaging the public in education and participation of recovery.

- Evaluating restoration successes (and setbacks) through ongoing adaptive management.

"With a population doubling in the next 20 years, recovery won't be quick, or simple," said Babbitt. "But this implementation represents a shift in stewardship, from defending the landscape to replenishing it. For through this scientific blueprint, we now envision nature not as a collection of parts, unrelated to mankind, but as an evolving communion of subjects to which we belong. "

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